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The Man They Called a Monster: Forty Years On

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Abstract
In 1981, Cassell Australia published Paul Wilson's monograph, *The Man They Called a Monster: Sexual Experiences Between Men and Boys*. In his book, Wilson examines the case of Clarence Osborne, an older man who had "sexual relations" with around 2500 boys and adolescents over a twenty-year period. He uses Osborne's life to reflect on broader questions of pedophilia in Australian society. In this commentary, I revisit the book to consider its contemporary legacy 40 years on. According to Google Scholar, at the time of this writing, the book has only 50 citations, yet it is a book that continues to live on in our cultural imaginary for a variety of reasons, and in no small part due to its author, Paul Wilson, and his remarkably similar interaction with the criminal justice system in the decades since its publication. This commentary explores the historical context in which the book was written, pays particular attention to the changing social attitudes towards pedophilia, the recent controversy pertaining to its author, and discourses surrounding the sexual autonomy of minors.

Keywords Paul Wilson · Clarence Osborne · Pedophilia · Child sexual abuse

Beginnings

Idioms are so often used that they can be meaningless, yet I think the phrase 'never judge a book by its cover' is imbued with surrealism when one looks at the front of Wilson's (1981) book. On the cover we see an empty bed, a boy, and an older man. The sheets are gently and tidily folded back, as if the bed is asking its onlookers for invitation. The boy and the older man are both looking at the bed, and the latter has his left hand on the boy's right shoulder. While a still picture, it looks like the older man is rubbing the boy's shoulder to comfort him. Or, perhaps, that's just the viewer's fear. Such is the sparse and minimalist nature of the book's illustration, it allows the viewer to fill in the blanks—and/or allow their imaginations to run wild.

I have shown the book cover to many people over the past couple of years, and the reactions often vary in degrees, but the elements of shock and surprise are universal. What the fuck is going on? Wait, what? Oh my god! Is that a joke? That's just creepy. Alas, we all have our own way with words. The colours blue and brown stick out. Blue is tied to the boy and brown to the older man. This cannot be an accident. Blue connotes boyhood, trust, faith. Brown connotes wisdom, confidence, security. The bed is brown because it's the older man's bed. Why is the older man showing the boy the bed? Is the blue boy getting into the brown bed? What will they do there, and how will it change them? Is the boy willing or resisting, and how can we ever really know? Is the man's hand on the boy's shoulder a sign of comfort or coercion, and again, how can we ever really know? This intersubjective interaction is infused with deep social questions, fissures, and emotions. It is amazing how the juxtaposition of a bed, a boy, and an older man can create so many emotions and meanings. And just as the older man is (perhaps) asking the boy to open those sheets further and hop in, one cannot help but wonder that the illustrator and author might also be hoping the book holder do the same—to open that book cover and figure out what is going on.

And trying to figure out what is going on is what I have sought to do since discovering the book in 2018. Then a research assistant post-Ph.D., I was tasked with reading the book and writing a summary in the context of 'conflicts of interest' in academic research. The project leader found this a useful framing in light of the book's author, Paul Wilson, and his conviction of child sexual abuse in 2016. At the time, they considered it a conflict that someone would write a book sympathetic of paedophiles when at the same time they had

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sexually abused two young girls. Nothing came of the project (not yet, at least), but I was more struck by the irony of the situation, and indeed would conceptualise it more with "insider research" (Taylor, 2011) than with a conflict of interest (the latter term just seems so transactional and bureaucratic). Part of my approach in this commentary is about making sense of this dissonance.

This commentary adds to existing scholarship on forgotten books and stories and the revelations of private lives clashing with public agendas. In recent years, stories have emerged to illustrate that the content and context of Wilson's book are not unique. Barry Reay's *Sex in the Archives: Writing American Sexual Histories* (2018) uses a diverse array of public and private, known and unknown archives in its excavation of American sexual practices and cultures. Gay Talese's *The Voyeur's Motel* (2016) closely resembles Wilson's (1981) book in its investigation of an individual, who also refers to themselves as a "sex researcher", who provides a research manuscript of their exploits to help write a book about their life. Various revelations associated with the #metoo movement have also revealed secrets and lies, of people who promoted people's sexual rights yet privately violated them (Farrow, 2017). These texts expose the ways in which stories evolve, identities move, meanings change, and secrets are revealed.

What is so interesting about reading Wilson's (1981) book today is its obviously controversial topic. Back then, Angelides (2005) notes that "the questions of child sexuality and adult–child sexual relations were to some extent up for grabs in the 1970s" (p. 280), and that it was not until the 1980s in Australia that the "signifier of paedophilia accrue[d] the kind of abhorrence and horror that it connotes today" (p. 276). It was also a time when social scientists conceived the problem as one of moral panics, and as Jenkins (1998, p. 102) notes, offenders "were to be pitied rather than punished". In one book review from the time, Lynne Gifford (1983, p. 371) called Wilson to task not for the book's topic, but its 'somewhat apolitical analysis'. For Gifford, however, the book provides a "comprehensive debunking" of the coercive myths affixed to paedophiles, and suggests the book would be ideal for:

> undergraduate courses dealing with social control, "deviance" and "normality", human relations, adolescence, counselling, and ethics, but it makes absorbing reading for anyone who enjoys having their prejudices tested. (Gifford, 1983, p. 371)

Today, however, the story is very different. Wilson's (1981) book is clearly objectionable, and particularly in the context of his conviction. In this commentary, I provide an (inherently partial) overview of the changing social attitudes towards pedophilia over the preceding forty years. I am interested in tracking the "rapid disappearance of controversies around paedophilia", exemplified by a movement from "fierce debate" to "relatively consensual disapproval" (Paternotte, 2014, p. 272). To do this, I first provide a close critical reading of Wilson's book, *The Man They Called a Monster: Sexual Experiences Between Men and Boys*, paying attention to the singular and the particular over the multiple and the general (Brummett, 2019). I then consider the book's legacy forty years on, particularly in the context of changing social attitudes and in light of Wilson's conviction.

The Book

> Once in a lifetime, if he is lucky, a social scientist stumbles across an incident that is both controversial and far-reaching in its implications. I came across such an incident two years ago when by accident, rather than design, I met Clarence Osborne. (Wilson, 1981, p. vii)

In 1976 Clarence Osborne walked into Paul Wilson's University of Queensland office and pronounced his fear that the police would confiscate his "research" (Wilson, 1990). This "research" contained accounts of "sexual relations" between Osborne and approximately 2500 boys and adolescents. Initially only "mildly interested in Osborne's dilemma", Wilson became "more involved, more interested – not so much in Clarence Osborne's plight but more in the implications of what that plight represented" (Wilson, 1981, pp. 6–7). His meetings and interviews with Osborne, the analysis of Osborne's "research" and draft manuscript, as well as Osborne's eventual suicide, all inspired Wilson's book. Wilson's (1981, p. vii) intention was to "write accurately and fairly a unique story that I had somewhat fortuitously acquired", and he forewarns the reader with this declaration: "[t]he conclusions I draw from the material are, it seems to me, inescapable, even if they are bound to be unpopular".

In the introductory passages Wilson (1981, pp. 7–8) charts Osborne's *modus operandi*:

> Clarence Osborne would meet boys in a variety of different settings, establish verbal rapport with them and then attempt to further the relationship in both physical and emotional ways. He contacted young males everywhere, when they were doing anything or everything. He met them on highways as they were hitch-hiking; he met them in parks when they were playing sports; he talked to them outside their homes and in shopping centres – in short Clarence Osborne's *modus operandi* was both varied and complex.

Osborne met boys and adolescents in a variety of settings but would most often drive to isolated areas looking to offer them rides. According to Wilson (1981, p. 29), Osborne "looked for particular signs in particular boys before he

approached them", and these signs involved being alone and, in Osborne's words, "to look as though they might be willing". This "willingness", Osborne claims, can be identified through their dress, posture, and eye contact (Wilson, 1981). According to Wilson (1981, p. 30), "Osborne stated that if there was any hesitation on the part of the boy in accepting a lift then he (Osborne) would not consider making a sexual overture to the boy". If the boy or adolescent did look willing, however, Osborne would use several "ploys" to gauge the boys/adolescent's interest once in the car. For example, if the boy/adolescent sat close to the door, then that was a sign the boy/adolescent was wary of physical overtures. If, conversely, the boy/adolescent sat close to Osborne or in the middle of the seat, Osborne took this as a positive sign. In Wilson's (1981) account, Osborne was also wary of boys/adolescents who made antagonistic remarks about homosexuality, and also those who did not appear willing to engage in conversation.

For the most part, Osborne appeared remarkably *successful* at initiating "sexual relations" with the boys/adolescents, and his record of 2500 contacts bears witness to this claim. According to Wilson (1981), Osborne believed he demonstrated an extraordinary skill in connecting emotionally with boys and adolescents through verbal communication. Wilson (1981, pp. 24–25) writes,

> Osborne saw himself as a skilled craftsman carefully establishing trust between himself and his youthful charges by using techniques built up over many years… Osborne saw himself as a man for all boys. He was supremely confident of his ability to get what he wanted from any of them and unashamedly admitted that he would adjust his technique to the characteristics and situations of his partners.

Once in the car and sensing a boy's/adolescent's comfort, Osborne would typically deploy the art of conversation to matters of sex. It was important that Osborne develop rapport with the boy/adolescent; Wilson (1981, p. 32) writes,

> Osborne would initiate conversation about football and fighting, about arrogant teachers and boring school lessons – about anything which interested the boys. But Osborne also had, in the eyes of the boys, a redeeming characteristic that they found singularly lacking in most other adults. Osborne listened; he listened with attentiveness, with patience and approval to all the things that preoccupied a youthful mind.

Once rapport developed, Osborne started talking about sex generally before personalising it to the particular boy/adolescent (Wilson, 1981). Osborne would often assure the boy/adolescent that they were not homosexual, and that they were engaging in mere "play" (Wilson, 1981).

During these sexual conversations, many of the boys/adolescents started to exhibit erections, and according to Wilson's (1981) account, Osborne would only touch the boys/adolescents once this occurred. Different things would then materialise depending upon the intersubjective interaction. Sometimes the sexual interaction would be a singular event, or sometimes he would have a relationship with a boy/adolescent for a few years. The nature of the contact also varied; mostly it involved mutual masturbation, oral sex, fondling, caressing, and kissing, and occasionally penetrative anal intercourse. According to Osborne's account all this behaviour was consensual. Osborne also kept diligent records of his "research" (Wilson, 1981, p. 6). This research comprised a detailed dossier of the boys/adolescents Osborne met, and it included some of the following information: name, date of birth, age, height and weight, wrist and ankle measurements, penis size flaccid and erect, circumcision status, the width of the "eye" of the penis, quantity and quality of ejaculate, and more (Wilson, 1981). Osborne also wrote a manuscript about his life and experiences, had more than 8-kms worth of recording tape (often recorded without the boy's/adolescent's knowledge and consent), and photographs (Wilson, 1981). Some of the photographs showed boy's penises in vacuum hoses and plastic pipes, boy's ejaculating, and a picture of boy's with eggs in their anuses emulating hens laying eggs (Wilson, 1981). Osborne freely sent many of these photographs, without consent, to overseas paedophile magazines for publication (Wilson, 1981). Normatively speaking, Osborne's conduct was ethically and morally wrong, exploitative, and damaging to the boy's/adolescent's lives. It is also remarkable to imagine how Osborne was able to get such detailed information from so many boys and engage in so much contact with so many of them.

In spite of the normatively shocking aspects of Osborne's activities, in the introductory chapters it is clear that Wilson (1981) paints a sympathetic portrait of Osborne (and his behaviour). While Wilson (1981, p. 9) states his intention is to "apply the dispassionate rules of rational enquiry by analysing his [Osborne's] relationships rather than reacting with a gut level antagonism", it is also clear that Wilson's terminological choices belie his intentions/beliefs and indeed reveal his attitudes towards Osborne. Perhaps the book's subtitle, "sexual experiences between men and boys", is the first hint. According to Wilson (1981, p. 15), Osborne was a "a man who loves boys". He had "youthful partners" (Wilson, 1981, pp. ix, 9, 20, 28, 30), "sexual relations" (p. 2), "sexual relationships" (p. 1), "physical relations" (p. 5), "relationships" (pp. ix, 8, 9), "relations" (p. 38), and "affairs" (p. 2). Rebutting the image of the "proverbial dirty old man handing out candy to young children at the edge of a playground" (Wilson, 1981, p. 15), Wilson contends that Osborne was "the man without candy" (p. 8).

According to Wilson (1981), Osborne did the following: "he made love to them" (p. 1), "sexually related to" boys (p. 1), engaged in "mutual masturbation" (pp. 1, 5, 41, 42), "the boys he … masturbated" (p. 1), "sexually and emotionally related" (p. vii), "sex" (pp. 2, 5, 8), and "forming relations" (p. 7). For Wilson (1981), the boys "met and related to Osborne" (p. viii), and pedophiliac relations are "man-boy relations" (p. 40). Moreover, paedophiles are described as "boy lovers" (pp. vii, 27), "men who love boys" (pp. viii, 26), and "child-lovers" (p. 13). I think it is important to highlight at this point that "sexual experiences" and "rapes", as well as other cognate terms, are not the same thing, and using such terms in these ways distorts our understanding of the extent, nature, and effects of these practices (Gilmore, 2019). It is not just terminological choices and euphemisms, however, that indicate Wilson's attitudes and beliefs towards Osborne specifically and paedophiles generally.

Wilson (1981) claims that all the boys/adolescents, some 2500 of them, engaged in consensual sexual relations with Osborne. One justification for this claim is that throughout the 20-year period in which Osborne sought out, and engaged in, sexual relations with boys/adolescents, none ever contacted the police (Wilson, 1981).[1] In fact, Osborne came to the attention of the police quite by accident (Wilson, 1981). According to Wilson's (1981) account, a mother overhead her son talking about Osborne who had taken nude photos of him; when the mother confirmed the story, she casually mentioned it at a social occasion to a policeman's wife.[2] Wilson (1981) also argues that following Osborne's death, the police found no evidence of physical coercion or physical harm throughout their lengthy investigation. Wilson (1981) continually asserts throughout the book that Osborne never used force on the boys/adolescents, but at no stage does Wilson ever provide a definition of "force". In fact, Wilson (1981, p. 37) argues that many boys sought out relationships with Osborne:

> it is quite clear that many of the boys deliberately sought Osborne's attention for the purpose of engaging in sexual relations with him. Osborne often boasted of his ability to attract boys and recorded many cases of where the boy, rather than Osborne himself, initiated contact. Some of the adolescents who approached Osborne were clearly homosexual in orientation and were searching for sexual adventures with older, more experienced men.

According to Wilson (1981, pp. 39, 57), many of the "adolescents were simply looking for sexual excitement", and "the boys were "pushed" towards the older man because of the lack of warmth and security they found in their families". Wilson (1981, p. 83) also argues that Osborne allowed each individual boy/adolescent to navigate the extent of the relationship, that he would "simply do what the boy desired and no more", and in certain instances Osborne, rather than the boy/adolescent, ceased the relationship.

What are we to make of this account thus far? Is it unsettling to read that boys/adolescents went after Osborne? Do we believe Wilson and Osborne's accounts? Throughout the book, Wilson (1981) continually stresses that: no force or violence occurred between Osborne and the boys/adolescents; many boys went after Osborne willingly; Osborne was only interested in providing them comfort and experiences that were missing from other aspects of their lives; and, Osborne only engaged in relatively minor sexual practices distinct from the social stereotypes of a "sex monster". Wilson uses personal accounts from the boys/adolescents as testimony for his claims:

> I enjoyed talking to him [Osborne] and I enjoyed the sex as well. He's the only man I've ever had a relationship with before or since. As you know I am married now with two kids, but at times I still think back to when he did those things to me and get excited by the thought of it. All I know is that I wanted some sex then and I got it, even though before I could never have imagined myself having it off with another guy, let alone a man who was about thirty years older than myself. But there was nothing heavy about him and it seemed so easy to do it with him and there was no way I felt guilty about a thing. I guess I would have preferred a girl but sometimes it's hard to get one and some of the ones you get anyway won't let you do anything with them. When I read in the paper about this guy who killed himself and was called a monster I was amazed. He was not heavy at all and what they said about him in the paper was untrue. (survivor, cited in Wilson, 1981, pp. 39-40) When I heard that he had killed himself, and heard all those horrible things the papers said about him I cried, and cried and cried. He was, I guess, the nearest thing I had to a father, and sometimes I thought a mother,

[1] This fact must be treated with scepticism if the imputation is that no violence occurred because no one came forward. Research into child sexual abuse (Alaggia, Collin-Vézina, & Lateef, 2019; McPhillips, 2016, 2019), the #metoo scandals (Farrow, 2017; Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019), and the more generalised "dark figure of crime", all highlight the ways in which experiences of violence can take decades to come to the surface, if they ever do at all—whether in the family, socially, or in the criminal justice system.

[2] The policeman then took it upon himself, with several colleagues, to investigate Osborne. They staked out Osborne's home and caught him photographing nude boys. They then searched Osborne's home, collected tape-recordings, photographs, and files, and returned with Osborne to the police station. Wilson (1981, p. 10) states that the police "were reluctant to take further action against Osborne until the material had been more thoroughly perused and legal advice on what Osborne could specifically be charged with was obtained". The police then returned Osborne to his home, and later that night, Osborne committed suicide (Wilson, 1981).

> and here he was being described in the paper as though he was some sort of crazy man raping young boys. It wasn't like that at all, I went to see him and he didn't have to drag me there. (survivor, cited in Wilson, 1981, p. 46)
>
> It was really a big kick to have (him) do things to me. I mean I really liked him touching me there and all over the body in fact. I might have felt a bit guilty to start with but as the years have gone by I just see it for what it was; just a bit of fun and a way for me to get a new experience. I can't really think how this could have possibly affected me adversely, but I sometimes think about what would have happened if we had been caught. Certainly, he (Osborne) would have been devastated by the law and the police. I think I would have been made to feel as though I was some sort of freak and might well have sort of begun to think of myself as being a queer or whatever. But that's all that might have happened. What really happened was enjoyable and didn't affect me in a major way at all. (survivor, cited in Wilson, 1981, p. 82)

For scholars and activists who believe that adult–child sexual relations are always and only exploitative and wrong, the above quotes certainly make for difficult reading. In these accounts, the boys/adolescents describe positive experiences with Osborne (Wilson, 1981).

Osborne also indicated that some of his previous "partners", now adults, still visited him.[3] One of the investigating officers also recounted:

> [i]t was not unusual for men, walking with their girlfriends and wives, to, when accidentally meeting Osborne in the street, rush over to him and shake him by the hands. When these men were kids they had known Osborne and looked on him now and then as being a really good guy. Some of the other policeman on the case just couldn't understand this. (Wilson, 1981, p. 90)

How was Osborne able to achieve seemingly positive and consensual relations with so many boys/adolescents? Given these statements, can we now look at Wilson's arguments and his description of Osborne through a more "enlightened" and sympathetic frame? Ultimately, I argue that we cannot, and I now turn to explain why this is the case.

Wilson's own biases impart methodological flaws on his research and book. While Wilson (1981) continually stresses that many of the boys recounted positive and consensual experiences with Osborne, it is not until the reader reaches the 52nd page of the book that they learn Wilson only spoke to 12 men out of 2500 or more "sexual partners". While Wilson (1981, p. viii) cautions early about generalising from such a small sample, this is precisely what he goes on to do by moving "from a discussion of Clarence Osborne to wider questions surrounding adult-youth relationships and the considerations of the legal, psychological and moral issues involved in this controversial topic". It is also not until the 90th page that the reader learns just how young some of Osborne's "partners" were—some as young as 7-years-old. Interestingly, Wilson (1981) introduces this fact only to compare Osborne's practices to the definition of Greek Love, and not as information that is interesting and relevant in its own right. Wilson (1981, p. 140) also leaves it to an endnote to mention that Osborne's preference "was for youths aged between 13 and 15 years". Thus, Wilson portrays Osborne in a sympathetic light throughout the book, yet the reader gets through more than one-third of the book before they discover the full extent of Osborne's conduct.

Perhaps some of Wilson's work can be attributed to minor errors or methodological oversights. Across the book, Wilson (1981) rarely provides pseudonyms to the accounts given by Osborne's "former partners". Thus, it is left unclear how many voices feature, and how often or rare certain people feature at all. I think it is important for the reader that quotes be clearly differentiated accordingly. In the book, Wilson (1981) says he spoke to twelve former "partners", yet in later work he writes "I was able to interview… about two dozen who, when younger, had been involved in relationships with Osborne" (Wilson, 1990, p. 91). In the initial book Wilson also implies Osborne died in 1979, yet in the later work he says it was 1977. In the initial book Wilson says a mother overheard her son talking about Osborne taking photographs, yet in the later book he writes "the mother of one boy found a nude photograph of her son in his room". In his later work Wilson (1990, p. 92) argues that Osborne "generally did not use verbal, emotional, or physical coercion to draw the boys into a sexual relationship", yet in the earlier work Wilson clearly documents the verbal "ploys" utilised. In the initial book Wilson (1981, p. 62) writes that the "police agreed that no money generally passed hands between Osborne and the boys", yet in his later work Wilson (1990, p. 93) writes that the boys "quickly realised that he [Osborne] was relatively generous and certainly exploitable for small amounts of money, food, or goods". Wilson (1990, p. 93) writes in the later book that "few if any of these cases involved sodomy", yet in the earlier book he writes that sodomy did occur (Wilson, 1981, pp. 41, 42, 79, 82, 83, 120). For a topic that involves considerations of "consent, age and sexual activity" (Wilson, 1990, p. 89), as well as the ways in which society and the criminal justice system responds to these issues historically and contemporaneously, I suggest that the accuracy of these details are paramount. However, it is not just errors

[3] Osborne, talking about one boy: "I stopped seeing him at seventeen although he still drops in even though he's married now" (Wilson, 1981, p. 51).

or oversights that make Wilson's arguments problematic. Below I provide one example of the ways in which he tries to minimise the harms of pedophilia in his book.

Pedophilia and the Analogous Case of Homosexuality?

Throughout the book Wilson (1981) continually introduces homosexuality to try and minimise the harms of pedophiliac behaviour. For example:

> Nor do boy-lovers obtain much support for their cause from their male homosexual colleagues. To many gay people, paedophiles threaten to reinforce all the 'straight' stereotypes that homosexual activists have been trying to shatter. For many years gays have emphasized that adult homosexuals do not, in the vast majority of cases, have an interest in children or adolescents, that gay teachers will not seduce their charges, and that the cases of child-molesting amongst homosexuals are far fewer than they are for heterosexuals. Paedophiles, particularly those who proselytize their activities, are seen as undoing most of the constructive public relations work that the gay community has engaged in. (Wilson, 1981, pp. 12-13)

I am perplexed by (the relevance of) this passage. Why is this passage contained within the book, and what is its meaning? What work does the comparison between homosexuals and paedophiles do here? How does this passage contribute to the book's thesis?

Wilson uses the topic of homosexuality to try to alleviate the reader's attitude towards pedophilia, specifically as an "analogous" example. In trying to constitute homosexuality in an efficacious light, Wilson is simultaneously trying to enlighten and improve society's views of pedophilia. For example:

> why one case of homosexual violence should be any more typical of homosexuality in general, than one case of heterosexual rape-murder is of heterosexuality in general, is not clear. But the fact that this equation is taken seriously by many people demonstrates the powerful emotional effects of irrational arguments. And paedophiles, more than any other groups, receive the brunt of such arguments in many different ways. (Wilson, 1981, p. 70)

Wilson (1981) is calling upon the reader to sympathise with the homosexual subject, and in so doing, he is hoping they might also sympathise with the paedophile subject. He is trying to improve the folk devil image of the homosexual subject as a parallel to improve the image of the pedophiliac subject.[4] For many queer people and scholars, the implications of Wilson's arguments are obviously troubling. The myth that homosexual subjects are paedophiles is one of the most potent and corrosive attacks against homosexuality (Cossins, 1999; Robinson, 2002). Bringing these two subject positions together without an appropriate degree of nuance risks conflating them—which it seems Wilson is deliberately doing. For example: "many paedophiles are conspicuously anxious, confused personalities who would have difficulty in adjusting to an adult homosexual subculture even if "treatment" was in fact successful" (Wilson, 1981, pp. 111–112). This quote implies, falsely, that all paedophiles are homosexual. It is ironic that elsewhere in Wilson's (1981, p. 94) book he criticises a judge's sentencing of an individual who, in conflating homosexuality with pedophilia, in "one fell swoop the judge was able to reinforce all the stereotypes that people have about homosexuals and homosexuality, effectively putting back the gay liberation movement fifty years". Perhaps it is worth repeating—Wilson does the same.[5]

Wilson on Pedophiles

Using the case of Clarence Osborne, Wilson (1981) makes several generalisations about paedophiles and their behaviour (or "hobby" as he often calls it). He suggests that paedophiles are misunderstood and that "Clarence Osborne and his fellow paedophiles are just part of a long tradition of folk devils created by a vengeful society and sensationalist press" (Wilson, 1981, pp. 67–68). Wilson (1981, p. 109) writes,

> [f]ar from being unrestrained sex maniacs – the common view taken by both police and judges – their approaches to children are almost always affectionate and gentle and the sexual acts which occur are mostly mutual display and genital fondling, resembling the typical sexual behaviour which goes on between children.

For Wilson (1981, p. 40), the stereotypes attached to paedophiles creates inaccurate representations of reality:

[4] Wilson (1981) does this elsewhere in the book. For example, see p. 100 where he looks at the dangerousness of the homosexual subject, and argues that this is not fair, "[a]nd so it is with paedophiles". He also compares the two on p. 111 when discussing "treatment" (from the conversion of homosexuality to heterosexuality, and paedophile to non-paedophile). Also see p. 122: "it is salutary to remember that adult homosexuals were seen as being both "monsters" and as being "mentally ill" a few short years ago".

[5] Also see Angelides (2005), who persuasively argues that homophobia played a central role in the discursive formation of the "paedophile", and that 'the paedophile' has been, and is, homosexual*ised* to demarcate normal and abnormal sexualities and masculinities.

> [t]he stereotypical picture of man-boy relations is that of an older man exploiting and seducing a naïve, innocent boy. This stereotype is, as we have seen, clearly a simplification of the dynamics involved in relationships between the two. Similarly the stereotype about the actual sexual practices that occur between men and boys is also a misleading picture of what actually happens.

For Wilson (1981), violence is the exception rather than the rule, and most pedophiliac encounters do not involve insertive penetration. He also suggests that many paedophiles are harmless and passive, and that we need to recognise the instances where children initiate contact with older people (Wilson, 1981). Wilson (1981) argues that many children seek out sexual encounters with older people because they are sexual beings, curious, worried about their sexual development, and live in isolated and neglected families. Wilson (1981, p. 109) also concludes that many men look back on their pedophiliac encounters with fondness, and "[u]nwilling or unresponsive children are simply not pursued by paedophiles because it is easy enough for them to find responsive children amongst their neighbours or acquaintances". On this basis, Wilson (1981, p. 129) suggests that it is unjustifiable to presume that all child–adult sexual "relationships" are exploitative, and a "redefinition of sex is required, not only in the context of pedophilia but in terms of human relationships generally".

In the final passages of his book, Wilson (1981) provides a brief—and I would argue, underdeveloped—summary of a bill of rights for children.[6] This involves:

1. A right to self-determination so that children have at least some say on matters which affect them most directly;
2. A right to a responsive environment—alternative forms of parental care have to be designed;
3. A right to equitable education—the child must have the right to all information available to adults including, and perhaps especially, information that makes adults feel uncomfortable;
4. Economic and political power;
5. Right to freedom from physical punishment;
6. Child's right to justice; and,
7. The right to sexual freedom (Wilson, 1981, pp. 131–132, text de-italicised).

Wilson (1981, p. 132) proposes that a prior condition to the final right be that "children must be provided with all information about sex and related matters so that they are in a position to make reasonable choices concerning their present and future sexual behaviour".[7] Wilson's motivation for this bill of rights can be summarised as follows: children are sexual beings with agency, paedophiles are mostly harmless people who do not exploit children, and sexual relations are given a status in society that is not deserved. On this latter point, Wilson (1981, pp. 129–130) explains:

> [u]nfortunately, in our society sex is seen as one of the few ways of achieving intimacy and that is more a reflection on the way in which we have distorted and perverted the nature of sexual expression, than it is a reflection of the activity of sex itself. In other words, if there is no commitment and no adverse consequence to the sexual act, then concepts such as 'a sense of responsibility' or 'being mature about sex' have no meaning whatsoever. In a strange and somewhat paradoxical way Clarence Osborne was reinforcing society's view that sex is tremendously important and therefore potentially destructive… After all, in measuring thousands of boys' penises and documenting his findings Osborne was doing in an exaggerated form what the doctors already do with sex. He was giving it an importance, 'constituting it' in Foucaultian terms, in a way that made it mystical and critical in people's lives. Osborne was giving sex an importance it probably does not deserve.

These are interesting comments and I unpack the arguments shortly, but suffice to say, I think it is the wrong move on Wilson's part to introduce this argument in the book's conclusion. There is no overt expression of this type of argument throughout earlier aspects of the book. By ordering the contents in this way, I suggest that Wilson (1981) starts with his arguments/beliefs and then moves to find theoretical justifications for them. While this is common for many researchers, given the nature of the topic one cannot help but reflect and speculate on his own motivations for doing so (which I turn to shortly).

[6] To be fair, Wilson (1981, p. 131) says "it is not my intention to give detailed submissions on such a bill", and is only interested in providing an "outline". I cannot help but wonder, however, why he does not provide a more comprehensive set of arguments given his own awareness of the contested nature of the topic.

[7] Wilson (1981, p. 133) goes on: "If we as a community are genuinely concerned about the fact that children might be sexually misused by adults, then we have a moral, and indeed a social obligation, to provide young people with the most contemporary and most relevant information and the knowledge which will allow them to refuse sexual advances. At the moment children are trained not to refuse adults anything and to accept all forms of physical affection as being the right of an adult to impose on a child. They are therefore not able to learn to trust their own emotional feelings and reactions to people and often become involved in physical relationships which they really do not wish to get involved in".

Wilson (1981, p. 133) concludes his book with the following statements, and it is worth quoting in detail:

> Osborne's case drives home one important point that should be a clear message to us all. And that point is very simply that how adults react and what adults say to interpret sexual acts may be much more influential, and much more crucial in the emotional and sexual development of the child than the actual sexual act in which he may have been involved. A punitive and draconian justice system that directly punishes a paedophile, indirectly scapegoats a boy who has been involved in a sexual relationship with an older man, violates this message and does so with an impact that severely damages both the man and the boy. For the reality is that the boys have come to older men and will continue, for time immemorial, to come to them in order to have their sexual and emotional needs met. In a very real sense the boys are attempting to reaffirm their own identities, to obtain some measure of self esteem, and to fill the vacuum left by their home environments.

On the second-last page Wilson (1981, pp. 133–134) introduces another new idea:

> [b]ut in saying all this we are still begging the question of what approach society generally and the criminal justice system specifically should take towards sexual relationships between older and younger males. I have argued that a legal age of consent is an arbitrary point, a line drawn that has no basis in the physiological or psychological development of the child. Furthermore, an age of consent in law does not prevent the sexual activity taking place and serves to perpetuate the myth that most, if not all, adults can and always do rationally consent to sexual relations. I would abolish any age of consent in sexual relations on the basis that in my opinion it is both unjust and unworkable, and I would also repeal all legislation relating to the age of consent in the field of sexuality specifically. Instead, offences would be considered on the basis of the use of violence, force, fraud or pressure rather than an arbitrary age limitation. This would mean that the concept would be an arbitrary concept that would be applied variably according to the case that one was talking about. In practice the police would only investigate a paedophile relationship if there was a complaint by the child himself or by the parents or relatives or by anyone else concerned with the welfare of the child. The onus would be on the police to prove that force or fraud or trickery were used to obtain sexual relations with the child. The police would not be able to argue, as they do now, that a crime has been committed just because a physical relationship between a man and a boy or adolescent took place.

Given the emotive and politically charged subject matter, as well as aspects of Wilson's personal life that have been revealed in the decades since this book's publication, there is much to process upon reading the final page.

Wilson the Man

It is impossible to write of *The Man They Called a Monster* (1981) without addressing the events that have transpired relating to its author over the past decade. In 2011, Paul Wilson was accused of historical child sexual abuse against two girls under 12 years of age, and in 2016 was found guilty and convicted of four counts of indecent treatment of a child under the age of 12 in the mid-1970s (Condon, 2016; Weston, 2016). He was sentenced to 18-month imprisonment and this was suspended after six months. Wilson continues to maintain his innocence.

A question: what are we to make of Wilson's book in light of his conviction of child sexual abuse? I suggest that several sections of his book, and indeed some of his later work, now read much more unnervingly and problematically. Wilson (1981, p. 2) writes that Osborne's life, like most paedophiles, was "full of contradictions". This appears quite ironic when we are now presented with knowledge of Wilson's private life and his public agenda. Wilson (1981, p. 83) also suggests that pedophiliac practices occur in the context of sexual games, role-play, and contests. This is relevant because the accusations made of Wilson in the 1970s involved such practices, including hide-and-seek (Dibben, 2016), blindfolds (Petrinec, 2015), and pronouncing that "Percy [his penis] is coming to play" (Weston, 2016). In reflecting on Osborne's story, Wilson (1981, p. 9) speculates how he might respond to a similar personal experience:

> unwittingly, perhaps, I reflected on how I would react to a heterosexual alternative — say, my own eight-year-old daughter "voluntarily" engaging in sexual relations with an adult male. Personalising social issues is generally an emotional rather than a rational way to approach them. In the case of my own daughter and a hypothetical other man, I am sure I would act towards the man with a considerable degree of verbal aggression and, perhaps, violence.

It is eerie to consider that a court of law determined Wilson was that "hypothetical other man" a few years before he wrote these words. Wilson (1981, p. 109) also wrote about the tactics paedophiles use in their search for children:

> [u]nwilling or unresponsive children are simply not pursued by paedophiles because it is easy enough for them to find responsive children amongst their neighbours or acquaintances. This pattern of making contact

> with such young people is particularly true for men who like young girls, because young girls are more protected than boys and less likely to go unaccompanied to cinemas, parks, sporting fields and similar places. And contrary to community expectations, paedophiles rarely hang around public toilets for they know that such places are hardly ever visited by boys looking for sex but are often visited by adults who would disapprove strongly of any approaches made by an adult to a youth.

In Wilson's case, the victim was a friend of his daughter and the abuse occurred in his home (Weston, 2016). The court heard that the abuse occurred routinely over a few years, and that it only stopped when the victim's family moved (Petrinec, 2015).

Finally, in *A Life of Crime* (1990), Wilson reflects on the public responses to his book. He acknowledges the "small storm" that the "monster" book brought him, yet argues that his "views on sexual exploitation have not changed much from the time when I wrote the book about the Osborne case" (Wilson, 1990, pp. 94–95, 96). Interestingly, Wilson moves his focus to innocent people, and he writes,

> I hate to think how many innocent men and women have landed in prison as a result of a miscarriage of justice perpetrated in an atmosphere of, "If someone accuses them, they must be guilty". (Wilson, 1990, p. 97)

It is ironic that Wilson believes he is now in this situation. Wilson (1990, p. 97) argues that "[e]very suspected case of child abuse ought to be investigated; but it should be carried out with great care and concern for all involved".[8] Wilson sums up his motivations for writing the book:

> the intention of the book was to do just this – to get beyond the labels of "monsters" and "perverts", and to understand the complexities inherent in the term "offenders" and "victims". I have absolutely no regrets about writing the book – even if it has created and will probably continue to create some uncomfortable moments for me. (Wilson, 1990, p. 98)

Discussion: Pasts and Presents

I think it is clear at this stage that my analysis of Wilson's work has been quite negative. While only in specific instances I have overtly critiqued Wilson's arguments, I have chosen to lay bare his own words for the purposes of "self-incrimination". Perhaps, however, I have been unfair to Wilson. While of course there are serious methodological flaws and underdeveloped theorising in his work, it is still important to consider the historical context in which the book was written. In the 1970s in Australia and throughout much of the western world, various movements—with the backing of several academics—arose to support paedophiles (Angelides, 2005). For example, the Australian Man/Boy Love Association and the Australian Paedophile Support Group advocated for the redefinition of sexual relations and sexuality, including the removal of the age of consent (Angelides, 2005). Wilson's book, then, needs to be considered in that context.

From the late nineteenth century to the 1970s, Angelides (2005) notes that the "paedophile subject" was an object of minimal concern. Considered a "temporary aberration", the paedophile subject was constituted as pitiable, inadequate and innocuous, pathetic and inferior, and perhaps above all, harmless (Angelides, 2005; Cowburn and Dominelli, 2001; Harrison et al., 2010). Throughout much of this period the child was given the status of an adult, and the adult paedophile was given the status of a child (Angelides, 2005). In this context, the child was precocious and aggressive, and the pedophiliac adult was victimised and infantilised (Angelides, 2005). However, this image of the paedophile was at once transformed in the 1970s and 1980s in the context of the rise of gay activism, feminism, child emancipation, paedophile liberation, anti-child pornography, and child sexual abuse movements (Angelides, 2005). Starting in the 1970s, the paedophile subject "hardened into a culturally palpable and totalising identity category" (Angelides, 2005, p. 273). The paedophile moved from an example of perversity (that is, practices) towards one of perversion (an identity). Ambiguous categories such as "carnal abuse" and "moral neglect" were replaced with more concrete terms "sexual abuse" and "sexual assault" (Angelides, 2005).

Wilson was writing his work in a historical context in which reverse discourses (Foucault, 1978) of pedophilia were only starting to emerge, yet today, this book is clearly controversial (and in no small part due to Wilson's conviction). Paternotte (2014, p. 272) notes the ways in which the controversies surrounding pedophilia have disappeared, whereby the mood has shifted from "fierce debate" to "relatively consensual disapproval". Put simply, reverse discourses have been silenced, and Wilson's book is delegitimised. Paternotte (2014) suggests the following reasons for this silent acceptance: transformation within the gay and lesbian movement; disconnect with minors' rights to sexual autonomy; established movements against child sexual abuse; and finally, a transformation in mentalities. It is impossible to fully unpack all of Wilson's (1981) book and its historical legacy, but in this penultimate section, I extend Paternotte's points via a linking back to Wilson's (1981) book and consider the ways

[8] Also see Coyle et al. (2009) for more contemporary arguments made by Wilson, a co-author, about the veracity of child witnesses.

in which the reception of his ideas have changed over the preceding forty years.

Paternotte (2014) suggests that the concretisation of "gay identity" in the 1970s and 80 s led to a focus on gay and lesbian issues, and in turn, a de-emphasis on issues increasingly seen as exterior to gay and lesbian lives. Broader coalitions between and across gender and sexuality diverse communities lessened, and as gay and lesbian groups garnered increased political legitimacy, these groups adopted strategic and pragmatic positions that disavowed other causes that "polluted" their capital (Paternotte, 2014). In short, pedophilia became an increasingly embarrassing topic that lessened their leverage, and symbolic lateral violence emerged between and across sexuality and gender diverse groups in the pursuit of particular (palatable) issues and causes. Wilson's (1981) argument demonstrates an analogising between homosexuality and pedophilia (as discussed earlier), yet today is conceptualised as a corrosive attack on queer subjects (Angelides, 2005). Considering Wilson's (1981) book today, it is interesting to note how the category of the paedophile has been further marginalised, while at the same time campaigns for homosexual equality have been mainstreamed. The homosexualising of pedophilia is rebutted at every twist and turn, and one by-product is the stigmatisation and pathologisation of paedophile subjects. And yet, the category of "sexuality and gender diverse" is forever in flux, always broadening and narrowing depending on the topic and temporospatial context. As some have started to (re)consider the paedophile as a group within the "sexuality and gender diverse" community (see, Walker & Panfil, 2017; also discussed shortly), it will be interesting to see how these arguments are received and develop over time.

Paternotte (2014) further notes how changes in conceptualisations of sexual autonomy over time has reduced the category of the "paedophile". A global shift in age of consent laws has meant that people of younger ages can now legally have sex, and this means, quite literally, that some paedophiles are "cured" as their sexual interests are no longer considered pedophiliac (Waites, 2005). It is interesting that Wilson's (1981) book sits alongside a whole range of efforts to increase young people's sexual autonomy, yet counterintuitively, it also sits as a controversial text that immorally condones adult–child sexual relations. It is perhaps a paradox that the age of consent has lowered over the years in many jurisdictions while our attitudes to Wilson and his argument have only intensified in shock and outrage. It may be that as the scope of the "paedophile" reduces in size, the social condemnation intensifies, and indeed, pro-pedophilia activists work within a much smaller (support) base (Patternotte, 2014).

During and since the book's publication there have also been a number of movements against child sexual abuse (Paternotte, 2014). Particularly, sexual abuse became a major social issue, and was increasingly linked with intergenerational sexual relations (Paternotte, 2014). This movement further politicised pedophilia and opened the topic to new disciplines and audiences, and particularly the influence of psychology (Paternotte, 2014). These new and different voices changed the nature of the debate, and delegitimised forms of behaviour that came to be seen as non-egalitarian (Paternotte, 2014). In recent times we have also seen the intensified conflation between sexual offending against children and sexual attraction towards children (Goode, 2010), and this works to pathologise offenders and non-offenders as one and the same. Some scholars have started to make the claim that pedophilia is a sexual orientation (see, for example, Seto, 2012), and such approaches seek to make the paedophile subject more sympathetic. The resonance and fear of the paedophile "monster" and "stranger-danger" rhetoric has strengthened while the more mundane, and more common, site of the family has lessened in focus and attention (McDonald, 2016). It is ironic that Wilson (1981) uses Osborne as an exemplar for a "passive paedophile", when in reality, Osborne's more than 2500 partners feeds into the "sex maniac" discourses Wilson is trying to rebut. In short, Wilson (1981) fails to portray Osborne and other paedophiles as passive subjects, and in recent times (for example, Seto, 2012) other tactics and arguments have emerged where others failed.

Finally, Paternotte (2014) notes that a change in mentalities occurred, whereby "childhood" and "adolescence" are now seen as firm onto-epistemological phases of life that require different needs than other (older) people. Perceptions of children as (sexually) innocent and vulnerable have only intensified, and invoking Hekma's (2008) comments of an "enigmatic transformation", Paternotte (2014, p. 274) suggests that the (Western) social world has moved "from an ideal of difference to an ideal of sameness between partners". Thus, in a society where Wilson tried to normalise adult–child relations, social movements were already underway that rendered his aim futile. While it is true that "past statements are frequently used to delegitimise certain public figures" (Paternotte, 2014, p. 265), it is important to note that these trends do not operate in a vacuum, but are reflective of ongoing debates and movements and the jostling of power/knowledge. Ultimately, even forty years after the publication of *The Man They Called a Monster*, it is perhaps still too premature to capture its reception, and indeed how its arguments will be received in future decades.

Endings

I have read Wilson's (1981) book many times now, and one thing continually and irreconcilably lingers in my mind: the question of harm. Riegel (2019, p. 1014) argues that harm

is extrinsic rather than intrinsic because there "is a complete fail[ure] to give any clear explanation of how or why child/older person sex, in and of itself, could be traumatic". Whether this is correct or not, it is also our (changing) social perceptions of pedophilia that inform how society understands and interprets these experiences and forms of behaviour. Harm and trauma might be the lynchpins upon which attitudes towards pedophilia rest. Wilson's (1981) book, no matter how controversial, adds to that discussion and debate. I commenced the start of this commentary with the book cover; perhaps it is prudent to end it with the back. The final sentence of the blurb reads: "The reader may not agree with the author's conclusions, but he (sic) will at least be made to think hard about the moral and social issues surrounding sexual relationships between men and youths". Perhaps it is incumbent upon us to consider difficult questions and arguments, in all their guises and no matter how morally repugnant we consider them to be, as they inevitably help us form the parameters of our own ethical lives, politics, and futures.

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